



Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner
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A history lesson to remember

As we wrap up the 2014-15 school year, I have high hopes for the future of our high school graduates in Kentucky. We will have a higher percentage of students successfully complete high school in four years than at any point in the history of the Commonwealth. Of those who graduate from high school, we will have the highest percentage of students reaching college- and career-readiness in the history of the Commonwealth. This is an amazing testament to the hard work and dedication of educators, parents and students in Kentucky.

Given these amazing results, I feel it important to remind readers of the recent important events in education history that have helped Kentucky reach these significant milestones.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 was and remains the foundation of our work. KERA became reality based on significant business support and support from the Prichard Committee to reform education in Kentucky. By any measure of student success, KERA has been the basis for improvement.

While KERA moved Kentucky from the cellar of state rankings to about the midway point, there was continued concern voiced through the late 1990s and 2000s about how prepared high school graduates were for college and career. Too many high school graduates were taking college placement tests and finding out that they needed to take remedial courses prior to taking credit-bearing college courses. The college remediation rates were as high as 80 percent in a number of our technical colleges. Remediation is a significant cost for students and colleges, and students who need remediation are much less likely to return to college after their first year than students who are ready for college when they enroll.

In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly came together again, as they did in 1990, and passed significant education reform legislation – Senate Bill 1. This legislation required the Kentucky Board of Education to set a goal to reduce by 50 percent by 2015 the percentage of high school graduates who were not ready for college-level work or prepared with the skills necessary to enter a career that would lead to a job that pays a living wage. In 2010, the percentage of students ready for college level work was 34 percent. A goal was set for at least 67 percent of high school graduates to be ready for college and career by 2015. From all indications, Kentucky will reach this goal with the Class of 2015.

In order to reach our goal, Senate Bill 1 required new standards, assessments, and accountability systems.

Throughout the 2009 session of the General Assembly and during the interim session of 2009, all of the stakeholders in Kentucky were aware and supportive of Kentucky adopting and implementing the Common Core standards for English/language arts and mathematics. It was very clear that a student must master these basic standards in order to achieve college- and career-readiness. Certainly, local districts could exceed the standards, however, not every student in Kentucky needs to take AP Chemistry, AP Calculus or other high level coursework in order to reach the college- and career-ready level. Acceptance into a top tier

university requires students take more rigorous courses, however taking these courses is a decision students and their parents must make depending on college- or career-plans.

Senate Bill 1 asked Kentucky educators to implement standards, assessments and a new accountability system so more students would reach college readiness. The universally accepted definition of college readiness is that a student would reach a level of performance that would enable the student to enter credit-bearing course work at a two-year or four-year university. The measures include ACT, Compass, and the state placement exams used by all public higher education programs – KYOTE. All Kentucky higher education institutions agreed on these measures and the scores needed for high school graduates to reach college readiness.

As parents talk with their students in grades 3-8 about the end of year K-PREP assessments and the high school end-of-course assessments, it is important to note that each parent and student will receive an assessment report in the fall. This assessment report will enable parents to know if their student is on track to reach the college- and career-readiness level upon graduation. It is very important for students that parents have a discussion with their child's teacher and school officials concerning student performance and how to support students in reaching college- and career-readiness by high school graduation.

Over the next few months, there will be a lot of political discussion and debate about the Kentucky's academic standards, assessments and accountability systems. While we can certainly revise the systems and make them stronger, it is important that parents recognize that the systems are working. More students are graduating from high school with the skills needed for college and career success.

Lots of politicians will tell you what they are against, however, it is difficult to find out what they really support, and if what they support has a track record of success. Hopefully, this brief history lesson will help filter the political rhetoric from the reality of proven systems that are successful in helping more children reach college- and career-readiness and emerge from high school ready to take the next step in life.

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Education Commissioner